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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001465

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [ASEC](#) [SNAR](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: MGLE01: A/S HILLEN MEETS WITH UN REPRESENTATIVE  
TO LEBANON

BEIRUT 00001465 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) UN Representative Geir Pedersen believes the events of the past few months have greatly changed the political situation in Lebanon, particularly concerning Hizballah. Whereas before, Hizballah essentially had a free pass on its arms and political objectives, now the terrorist organization finds it has to defend its positions both in the National Dialogue and the media. Pedersen also believes the Lebanese decision to pursue disarmament of Palestinian militias located outside the refugee camps is significant, even though the actual number of militiamen involved is relatively small.

He stated it has re-energized the overall disarmament process and, if successfully implemented, will deprive Syria of a means of instability. The UN Representative stated that Lebanon and the international community should push Syria hard on border demarcation, diplomatic recognition, and committing to a formal position on Shebaa Farms. Lastly, he believed the recent stability in Lebanon could be rapidly undone if the Iranian nuclear standoff badly deteriorates and Iran instructs its Hizballah proxies to react. End summary.

¶2. (U) UN Secretary General's Personal Representative to Lebanon Geir Pedersen met with Pol-Mil A/S John Hillen and the Ambassador on May 4 at the UN Headquarters in Beirut. UN senior advisors Imran Riza and Salman Sheikh, as well as A/S Hillen's Special Assistant Matthew Lehrman, military advisor Major Reginald Robinson and poloff, also attended the meeting.

¶3. (C) A/S Hillen, who had just completed a tour of UNIFIL's operating area in south Lebanon, noted the rapid pace of economic development in the border region since his last visit, as well as the apparent calm. Representative Pedersen commented that the entire UNIFIL zone had been stable for several weeks, ever since the beginning of the National Dialogue process (March 3), and said he hoped the dialogue would continue because it appears to have dampened Hizballah's aggressive behavior, if not its rhetoric.

¶4. (C) Pedersen maintained that a combination of factors has produced a positive atmosphere that should be exploited, specifically noting the applicable Security Council

resolutions and presidential statement, moderate success in the National Dialogue process, PM Siniora's willingness to meet with the Syrian president to discuss bilateral relations, and the continuing strong international support of Lebanon's pro-reform government. Pedersen believes these developments have made both Syria and Hizballah uncomfortable and the pressure should be maintained.

#### JUMBLATT'S IMPORTANT CHANGE OF HEART

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15. (C) Pedersen said that perhaps the most significant recent change was the willingness of Druse leader Walid Jumblatt to confront Syrian leadership and demand that Lebanon's leaders discuss topics that were previously off-limits. "Walid broke the taboos and went public," remarked the UN envoy. He said Jumblatt's actions put considerable pressure on Hizballah -- and they are not used to it. He argued that before Jumblatt put Hizballah's disarmament on the table, the terror organization had free reign in the south and serious leverage with the government. Now, Pedersen continued, Nasrallah had to defend their weapons and political objectives, and had been compelled to put the latter in a Lebanese context. In his opinion, Hizballah is uncomfortable trying to explain its relationship with Tehran and Damascus to the Lebanese public and has committed several mistakes. The most notable is that they are now caught in a clear contradiction: are they philosophical allies with Tehran's leadership, or are they a "genuinely Lebanese" entity.

16. (C) Pedersen remarked it was interesting to see Nasrallah declare he does not respond to Syrian direction and then try to explain actions which have an obvious connection with regional events. He remarked that it will become even more interesting to see how Hizballah responds to developments in the Iranian nuclear dossier.

BEIRUT 00001465 002.2 OF 003

#### DISARMING THE PALESTINIAN MILITIAS

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17. (C) According to Pedersen, the second major change in the political landscape has been the National Dialogue's "historic" agreement to disarm Palestinian militias that have positions outside the 12 main refugee camps. Although the UN envoy admitted those groups only account for a "few hundred" militiamen, he maintained it was politically significant because it placed disarmament in full public view and could not fail to impact Hizballah.

18. (C) Pedersen said that Syria has a difficult decision to make -- it understands disarming "rejectionist" Palestinian militias will require its acquiescence, and it could gain some international goodwill by allowing it to proceed. But, according to Pedersen, the Syrian leadership also realizes it will be losing an important tool for destabilizing Lebanon and the ability to attack Israel by proxy. One aspect that may help the process is that, in Pedersen's view, it does not require an Asad-Siniora meeting, like most of the other issues discussed by the National Dialogue. Pedersen asked the US to maintain its steady pressure on Syria on this and other bi-lateral issues. "If successful," he concluded, "we could unlock the situation and reduce much of the current cynicism."

#### SHEBAA FARMS

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19. (C) Representative Pedersen recognized the US position that Lebanon's emphasis on Shebaa Farms is excessive and likely to lead to a Syrian/Hizballah trap. But, he argued, that like it or not, the "liberation" of the disputed area had entered Lebanon's national consciousness and had somehow to be addressed. In the most recent National Dialogue

meetings, Hassan Nasrallah had made an issue out of Lebanon's national defense strategy that specifically included the return of Shebaa -- and the Lebanese public appear to have accepted his premise. The question posed by Pedersen was how to "unlock" this stalemate without Syria's (problematic) participation. Pedersen said the UN is unlikely draw the borders, but perhaps the Security Council could "recognize" Lebanon's claim, as long it was not challenged by Syria.

¶10. (C) According to Pedersen, the greatest problem with Shebaa is its geographic definition -- there is little agreement about how much area is actually involved. The Ambassador also pointed out that not all Lebanese factions (i.e. Hizballah) even wanted it defined; ambiguity serves their purpose. But Pedersen countered that if an acceptable boundary could be agreed upon and it were "returned" to Lebanese sovereignty, it would put enormous pressure on Hizballah, not only from the international community, but from almost all of Lebanon's political spectrum.

¶11. (C) Obviously, he continued, there would have to be a national consensus (via the National Dialogue process) that Shebaa would indeed be Lebanon's (and Hizballah's) final demand and that resolution of the issue would remove all pretext for action against Israel. Pedersen concluded by noting that Hizballah has committed itself and the chance to make it abide by its commitment was worth the effort.

#### PROPOSAL TO REPEAT A GESTURE

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¶12. (C) Along with Shebaa Farms, it was noted that Hizballah has long made an issue of the location of Israeli minefields in territory they withdrew from in 2000, even though Israeli forces at that time provided maps to the GOL with this information. The Ambassador observed that despite this fact, many Lebanese continue to believe this important humanitarian information was never released. It was suggested that Pedersen could propose that the IDF repeat the turnover of this data in a way by which the Lebanese could no longer maintain that they had not received the maps. This gesture would be perceived in a positive manner by most Lebanese and remove one more justification for its arms from Hizballah's rhetoric.

#### SYRIAN ACTIVITY INSIDE LEBANON'S BORDER

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BEIRUT 00001465 003 OF 003

¶13. (C) According to his sources, Pedersen said Syrian border guards had indeed built a number of earthen barriers and manned "two or three" new guard posts inside Lebanese territory near the villages of Ras Baalbek and Aarsal. He confirmed the berms were new construction and were located 1-4 kilometers inside a fairly well recognized border (it runs along the top of a ridge in this area). Pedersen thought the Syrian claim of stopping smuggling was disingenuous at best. He said his contacts in Hizballah had fallen in line with their Syrian mentors and were parroting the same excuse, but Pedersen got the clear impression they were slightly embarrassed by the weak Syrian charade.

¶14. (C) Pedersen praised PM Siniora's initial low-key response to the situation by calling on local officials to discuss and settle the matter. A meeting between the respective Lebanese and Syrian governors has already been scheduled for next Tuesday and Pedersen felt the indications were positive. UN senior advisor Salman Sheikh, however, stated his belief that, as international pressure ratchets up on Syria, there may be some near-term increase in tensions, with the resulting increased likelihood of a serious incident. He did not have solid proof, but said he based his opinion on his understanding of past Syrian behavior in similar situations.

¶15. (C) Representative Pedersen opined that continued stability in Lebanon, particularly in the south, depended much on regional developments, specifically how the international community dealt with Iran's nuclear ambitions -- and Iran's response.

¶16. (C) In summation, A/S Hillen assured Pedersen that US policy was to provide firm support to Lebanon's pro-reform trajectory, full implementation of UNSCR 1559, and the country's on-going National Dialogue process. Regarding political-military assistance, A/S Hillen stated that the US and its international partners could provide Lebanon with capabilities, but it was up to the Lebanese themselves to effectively use them in their transition to democracy.

¶17. (U) This cable has been cleared by A/S Hillen.  
FELTMAN